



STATE SENATOR • LIZ BRATER • 18TH DISTRICT

Brater Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 9, 2005

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Education Committee Hears Testimony on Brater's Compulsory Attendance Bill

(LANSING)—State Sen. Liz Brater's compulsory attendance bill received its first official action today. The Senate Education Committee heard testimony from Sen. Brater and a host of school and community organizations.

Currently, sixteen-year-olds do not need parental permission to drop out of school. This bill would require students to attend school until the age of 18. In addition to the attendance requirements, this bill also provides a provision that will allow community college classes, vocational education, and work study programs to count toward a high school diploma.

In her testimony, Sen. Brater said, "Education is the gateway to prosperity, advancement and opportunity in our society. We must do our utmost to give young people every chance to succeed. The first step toward a good job is a good education, and most adolescents lack the maturity to comprehend how severely their lives will be limited if they leave school."

The consensus among most of those who testified was that this bill is necessary to provide parents and schools with one more tool to help keep kids in school. They shared the feeling that it is not the only step, but it is a necessary first step.

Testifying in support of the bill were:

- Jim Ballard from the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals
- Louise Somalski from the Michigan Federation of Teachers
- Bob Morris from the Michigan Department of Education
- Andrea Yokich a counselor from Ingham Intermediate School District
- Ellen Hoekstra from Capitol Services

Additionally, written testimony in support of the bill was provided by:

- Michigan Association of School Boards
- Oakland School District
- Michigan's Children
- Michigan Parent Teach Student Association
- Calhoun Intermediate School District

The only dissenting voices were Jim Sandy, the director of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce's Education Excellence program and Paul Stankewitz of the Michigan Catholic Conference. Both confessed that it is difficult to oppose the bill but insisted that before requirements can be raised, the alternative programs that this bill supports need to be made more attractive.

In response to concerns raised at the hearing Brater said, "I am hopeful that we can work together to overcome the obstacles identified. I intend to continue gathering input from all interested parties."

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average male high school dropout earns only \$19,000 per year while the average female drop-out makes only \$12,000. The average high school graduate will have an annual income at least 50% higher than his or her non-graduate counterpart. This disparity grows every year. According to the Department of Corrections, approximately 70% of the inmate population in Michigan prisons last year had not completed high school. The state spends \$6,700 per pupil per year to educate them, but it costs almost \$30,000 per year to house a prison inmate.

On the prison statistics, Brater said, "It is cheaper and more humane to educate students now rather than incarcerate them later."

As part of No Child Left Behind, one of the stipulations for the "Adequate Yearly Progress" requirement is a graduation rate of at least 80%. In a small district even a few students can make a huge difference in reaching that goal.

In closing, Brater said, "Every Michigan child deserves a chance to succeed, and Michigan needs every one of its children to succeed. That's why we should raise the school mandatory attendance age to 18."

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State Senator Brater represents Senate District 18 which includes the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, the Villages of Barton Hills, Chelsea, and Dexter, and the following townships: Ann Arbor, Augusta, Dexter, Freedom, Lima, Lyndon, Northfield, Salem, Scio, Sharon, Superior, Sylvan, Webster and Ypsilanti. She is the minority vice chair of the natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism Committee.